



**REMARKS BY LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY JACKIE LACEY  
NOTARIO FRAUD UNIT NEWS CONFERENCE  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2019**

One of the great strengths of our community is its diversity. We are fortunate to live in a place rich in cultures, languages and ideas.

One in three people living in Los Angeles County was born outside of the United States, according to the most recent census data. Our great diversity attracts more than our share of people seeking to manipulate and cheat some of our newest residents out of their hard-earned money. As a result, many of our neighbors may be more likely to become victims of fraud and other financial crimes due to their cultural backgrounds and economic situations.

Everyone – regardless of their immigration status – deserves to be protected against crime and to receive justice when they have been victimized.

To combat these crimes, I established the Notario Fraud Unit in 2017. Since then, my office has prosecuted eight major criminal cases and brought justice to 300 victims who lost a total of \$3 million to immigration fraud. We currently are investigating several more cases involving another 300-plus victims.

Before I tell you more about these cases, I want to thank the Board of Supervisors. The supervisors graciously provided my office with the resources needed to support the specialized prosecution of these devastating crimes. With their help, I was able to designate two full-time deputy district attorneys and an investigator to develop criminal cases involving immigration fraud and the unlicensed practice of law. The funding comes from a 2016 consumer protection settlement with Wells Fargo Bank.

For those unfamiliar with the term “notario,” it is a word often used interchangeably with “attorney” in some Latin American countries. Here in California, it is illegal for immigration consultants to call themselves “notarios” because it gives the false impression that they are licensed attorneys. Yet con artists use this term every day to deceive their unsuspecting victims. They collect high fees for legal services they cannot and do not provide. Families are left without the legal help they need or the money required to hire someone else to help them resolve their immigration issues.

Today, I want to share with you some of our recent successes:

Just last week, prosecutors from my Consumer Protection Division secured a conviction against **Romina Aida Zadorian**. Ms. Zadorian claimed to be an attorney or government worker. She charged her 91 victims hundreds of thousands of dollars for immigration services they never received.

Ms. Zadorian was convicted of grand theft, extortion and false government documents. She was sentenced to 15 years in state prison and ordered to pay more than \$660,000 in restitution to her victims.

**Gregory Chavez** posed as a law enforcement officer and promised the families of immigration detainees that he could get their loved ones out of custody for a price. In June 2017, Mr. Chavez was convicted of grand theft, perjury, extortion, conspiracy and counterfeit seal. He was sentenced to 10 years in county jail and five years of mandatory supervision. He was ordered to pay more than \$500,000 in restitution to his 102 victims.

**Augusto “Tito” Gonzalez De La Cruz** claimed he was an immigration attorney and promised to expedite the processing of visas, resident alien cards and citizenship petitions. In October, Mr. Gonzalez De La Cruz was convicted of grand theft. He was sentenced to five years in county jail and four years of mandatory supervision. He was ordered to pay \$400,000 in restitution to his 35 victims.

**Dalila Moreno** told her victims that she worked for the government or had special government connections. She promised to expedite the processing of immigration paperwork. She forged visas and created false passport stamps. In August, Ms. Moreno was convicted of counterfeit seal, forgery, grand theft of personal property, extortion and attempted grand theft of personal property. She was sentenced to nine years in county jail and three years of mandatory supervision. She was ordered to pay more than \$300,000 in restitution to her 32 victims.

As you can see from these examples, notario fraud is one of the most common forms of immigration fraud in Los Angeles County due to our large Spanish-speaking population. These scams are not limited to just the Latino community, however.

My office will investigate and prosecute these devastating financial crimes wherever they occur. I am committed to protecting all residents of Los Angeles County. I will aggressively prosecute anyone who preys upon another person because of their language or cultural differences or their residency status.

I encourage victims of immigration fraud to report this crime to local law enforcement or my Notario Fraud Unit at 213-257-2450.

My office is doing its part to safeguard people before they fall prey to these schemes.

In addition to prosecuting cases, deputy district attorneys assigned to the Notario Fraud Unit conduct public outreach and education. They participate in immigration task forces with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. They draft legislation to better protect consumers, and they train prosecutors, law enforcement personnel and consumer advocates on how to put together these large and complex cases.

Next month, in fact, my office is bringing together an array of experts for a day-long Consumer Fraud Summit. This informational summit is designed for prosecutors, law enforcement personnel, elected officials and community-based advocates who can help spread the word on how to help us reduce financial fraud throughout Los Angeles County.

I began a bilingual public outreach campaign in May 2015 to warn people about financial scams and offer them tips on how to avoid becoming victims.

The twice-monthly Fraud Alerts are shared through news releases, with videos and on social media. We distribute nearly 6,000 printed alerts each month to senior centers and other public locations throughout the county.

I encourage you to follow my office on Twitter and Instagram – At-LADA-Office – and use Hashtag-Fraud-Friday to stay up to date on the latest scams.

Rest assured, my office will prosecute anyone who commits a crime against any resident of Los Angeles County – no matter where they were born, what language they speak or their residency status.

We will continue to seek justice for those who have lost their hard-earned money to criminals who take advantage of immigrants seeking legitimate legal services. We will help victims of financial crimes seek restitution from those who betrayed their trust and jeopardized their shot at obtaining the legal assistance they need.

Everyone has protection under the law. The Notario Fraud Unit is helping us provide that protection.

### **[About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#)**

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.